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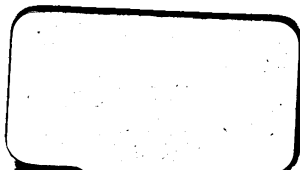
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Threepence each, or Twenty Shillings per Hundred.

Saint Mary,
THE VIRGIN AND THE WIFE.

By the Author of the Black Fence.

SECOND EDITION.

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1850.



ADVERTISEMENT.

In the present edition a few doubtful expressions have been altered, and two new stanzas are, for obvious reasons, introduced immediately before the last of the poem.

SAINT MARY,

• THE VIRGIN AND THE WIFE.

SPEAKERS.

A SISTER OF CHARITY OF THE ROMISH CHURCH.

A FEMALE COTTAGER OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

SISTER OF CHARITY.

O Woman, heavy-laden with a weight of care and woe,
Whose cheek is pale with watching, and whose eyes with tears o'er-
flow,—

Poor child of want and poverty,—sad mother,—widow'd wife,—
So worn that thou canst hardly bear the burden of thy life;
Listen gladly, while I tell thee of a comfort and a cure
From the blessed Virgin Mother—Ever Virgin—ever pure.

She sits beside the throne of God,—she is the Queen of Heaven,
And power and might to her of right are by our Saviour given :
He yields her meek submission,—for a dutious son is He,
And to ask whate'er he hath to give, who else so meet as she?
O'er Him, o'er us, o'er heaven and earth, her sway must still
endure,—
She's the blessed Virgin Mother—Ever Virgin—ever pure.

A soft and tender heart is her's, as virgins' hearts should be,
And she loveth well all things that dwell in earth and air and sea ;
But Holy Church she loveth best—the Holy Church of Rome,—
And those who make that Church on earth their harbour and their
home :
And gladly to that Holy Church would she all hearts allure,—
Would the blessed Virgin Mother—Ever Virgin—ever pure.

The heretic she favoureth not, who walks in erring ways,
Nor blesseth much the wedded lot, nor giveth it her praise :
For the wedded life she never knew, nor all its earthly bliss,
Nor a husband's fond embraces, nor a daughter's loving kiss ;
But still a chaste and spotless bride did all her life endure,—
Did the blessed Virgin Mother—Ever Virgin—ever pure.

She was not born as mortals are, in taint of mortal sin,
But all unsoil'd—immaculate—divinely pure within ;
More pure than from her Maker's hands was our first mother Eve,—
For so the Holy Father* saith, and so we must believe ;
For the Holy Father's word is still infallible and sure
As the blessed Virgin Mother's—Ever Virgin—ever pure.

* Pius the Ninth, the present Pope of Rome.

Then come, afflicted woman, lay thy weary burden down
At the blessed Virgin Mother's feet, who wears the heavenly crown;
Forsake the ways of error—be our Holy Church obey'd,
And give thy sickly girl to Her, to live and die a maid:
So shalt thou joy and comfort at the gracious hands secure
Of the blessed Virgin Mother—Ever Virgin—ever pure.

And she shall intercede for thee before the throne of grace,
Where she beholds, as angels do, our Heavenly Father's face;
And thy daughter shall recover, and thy husband return home,
And thou and he shall bow the knee to the Holy Church of Rome;
And purgatorial pains for both shall no long time endure,
Through Our Lady's intercession—Ever Virgin—ever pure.

FEMALE COTTAGER.

O Lady, thou art mild and good—thy voice is soft and kind,
And in thy gentle eyes I read a pure and heavenly mind;
And like an angel from above hast thou been with me here
In the day of my affliction, when my heart was dark and drear;
In the absence of my husband—in the sickness of my child,
Thou hast been a light from heaven itself, so merciful and mild.

Thou hast sat beside my daughter's bed—thou hast brought her
dainty food,
And medicine to assuage her pain, and looks which did her good;
Thou hast still'd her when she murmur'd—thou hast soothed her
when she wept,—
Thou hast watched and waked when I, o'er-wrought with toil and
sorrow, slept;
I would give my life a thousand times to please or profit thee,—
But, lady—lady—ask not that which must not, cannot be.

I know that thou art holier far than I can e'er become,
Though thou indeed dost love the creed of thy mother Church of
Rome ;

And, lady, for thy gentle sake, I'll speak with reverence mild
Of that which seems, to thy pure heart, religion undefiled :
But never, lady, here on earth, can we in faith agree,
For there lies a gulf between us, which I cannot cross to thee.

I love the Virgin Mother, and I cherish her dear name
As an holy thought to soothe the soul in this world of sin and shame ;
I bless her gentle memory, which hath triumphed o'er the tomb,
For the blessing which she brought to Man by the travail of her
womb ;

But I cannot bow the knee to her, as though she reigned in heaven,
Nor hope through her—but through her Son—to have my sins
forgiven.

For her body saw corruption, and her soul was left in hell,*
Where the souls of the departed till the resurrection dwell ;
She never brake the bonds of death, nor burst her charnel-prison,
Nor, like her blessed Son, the Lord, to God's right hand hath risen ;
But her spirit dwells in Paradise—her body sleeps in dust,
With the spirits of the righteous—with the bodies of the just.

Thou say'st the Romish Bishop saith she was not born in sin,
But from the womb immaculate—divinely pure within ;
But nought of this, O lady dear, is written in God's word,
And nought of this, our parson saith, the ancient Fathers heard ;
And I feel, within my heart of hearts, that true it cannot be,
But that she indeed was born in sin—in sin like thee and me.

* Hades, the abode of departed spirits, to which our Lord descended, but in
which He abode not.

Tis little that the scripture tells,—but e'en that little shows
That she, like us, was weak and frail in her trials and her woes ;
That she sometimes deserved rebuke, as thou or I may do,—
That she was still, in thought and will, fallen Woman through and
through :

O joy ! for us that she was thus, and shall be, without end,
No Goddess—but a sister;—not an angel—but a friend.

For surely if her birth had been, like that of her blest Son,
Unstained by sin ancestral—our redemption were undone :
He scarce had been our Brother here—His spirit scarce had known
How holiest hearts, assail'd and stung by sharp temptations, groan :
Unless through Woman, as she is, his human life began,
To me it seems the Son of God was scarce the Son of Man.

Thou say'st she died a virgin still,—'tis what we cannot know,
But I should grieve could I believe that it indeed was so :
For holier, as it seems to me, than one of single life
Is the gracious Christian mother, and the godly Christian wife ;
And more to wife and mother than to maid unwed is given
Of the griefs and cares which sift the soul, and make it fit for
heaven.

There are fountains, in a woman's heart, of holiest joy and bliss,
Which a husband's love alone unseals, and an infant's blessed kiss ;
There are fountains, in a woman's heart, of holiest grief and pain,
Which in the saintliest virgin life must shut and sealed remain.
Thou, lady, in thy lonely path, may'st walk like angels here,—
But souls like mine must God refine by the trouble and the tear.

My child lies on her fever'd bed,—her father is at sea,—
And I've need to pray, both night and day, for her and him and me :
And warmer, holier, is the prayer for husband and for child
Than aught that e'er unclosed the lips of virgin undefiled :
And it solaces my aching heart, and it soothes my throbbing brow,
To think that blessed Mary may have felt what I feel now.

I have thought of her in happier days—in days of home delight,
When I pillow'd on my husband's breast my weary head at night ;
I have seen her, with my fancy's eye, in the glory which she shed
O'er Joseph's peaceful home and hearth—o'er Joseph's marriage bed :
In her joys and in her sorrows—in her late and early life,—
O how holy was the Virgin !—O how holy was the Wife !

I ask sometimes,—When this dark earth has closed at last o'er me,
And my disembodied spirit to the spirit-world may flee—
Shall I meet the blessed Mary, and behold her face to face ?
Will she greet me like a daughter in her goodness and her grace ?
Shall her spirit then respond to mine, and each the other know,
By the household joys which both have felt—by the wife's and
mother's woe ?

I cannot tell—'tis vain to ask—but, lady, rob me not
Of thoughts and hopes which sweeten now the sorrows of my lot.
Let me cleave to that dear image of the mother of my Lord,—
The sinful, but the sanctified—the loved, but not adored,—
As one with me in heart and hope, though purer, holier far,—
Yea holier than the holiest souls of maid or mother are.

And, dearest lady, tempt me not my daughter's life to save,
By burying her, restored to health, in a dreary living grave.
On her God's blessed will be done!—if He shall spare her life,
Let her live as seemeth best to her—a virgin or a wife;
But rather than devote her now to that unnatural doom,
Let me kneel beside her death-bed—let me weep upon her tomb.

And press me not to join thy Church;—I dare not leave my own—
For in that I've found an accessure to my heavenly Father's throne;
And His Spirit witnesseth with mine that there his grace abides,
And he loveth yet our Zion more than all the world besides.
Take then the path thou deem'st the right—and, lady, so must I,
For in the blessed English Church I mean to live and die.

Your Pope may be a learned priest, and a prince of high degree,
But God and Jesus Christ are more infallible than he;
And I in God, through Jesus Christ, rest all my faith and hope,
And indeed I cannot part with these for Prelate or for Pope:
I still must keep my simple creed, and tread the path I've trod,
By the help of my Redeemer,—by the guidance of my God.

I must bend my knee to him alone whom all the worlds obey,
To Him who breathed the breath of life into this mortal clay;
To Him through whose atoning blood is all our guilt forgiven,
To Him through whom the sinful soul is born anew for heaven:
To Him who reigneth and shall reign o'er heaven and all its host;
TO THE EVERLASTING FATHER—THE SON—THE HOLY GHOST.

I know that I must struggle hard the Christian crown to win,—
Sore fightings must be mine without, and frequent fears within :
But frail and feeble though I be—poor daughter of the dust,
There's ONE will intercede for me, and Him ALONE I'll trust.
'Twould shake my perfect faith in Him on weaker names to call,
And though there were a million such, HE'S MORE THAN
WORTH THEM ALL.

Then, gracious lady, blame me not, nor deem thy boons unfelt,
Because I pray not where thou pray'st, nor kneel where thou hast
knelt :

Between us hangs a veil, which we as yet may not remove,
Till faith and hope, their office done, are swallowed up in love ;
And Protestant and Papist meet before the Eternal throne,
To see as they have still been seen, and to know as they are known.





